

Policy & Environmental Change (PEC):

Improving the Health of Your Community

Daily, the media reminds us of the serious public health problems that plague America:

- ☑ epidemic rates of obesity and diabetes
- ☑ high rates of death from heart disease, stroke, and cancer
- ☑ poor nutritional and physical activity habits
- ☑ high cost of health care
- ☑ implications of an aging population on health care costs and the burden of disease
- ☑ disparities in health status among our citizens

These health problems cannot be solved solely through changing individuals' actions and health choices. We must collectively work to create communities where healthy choices are easy, acceptable, and fun to make. Communities that implement policies and create environments that incorporate the previous characteristics are healthier and more satisfying places to live, work, and play.

What is Policy & Environmental Change?



"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." -- Margaret Mead

Making changes in policies and environmental settings where people work, congregate or live provide essential support for individuals to increase daily physical activity, select healthier foods, and decrease exposure to tobacco products or by-products such as smoke.

Policies and environmental changes can affect the chronic disease risks of many people simultaneously, rather than the traditional health promotion intervention that focus on changing the behavior of single individuals.

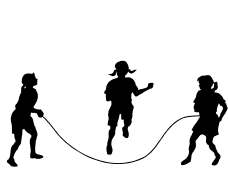
Policies are laws, regulations, and rules (both formal and informal) that support healthy lifestyles. Examples of health policies include: laws and regulations that restrict smoking in public buildings; organizational rules that provide time off during work hours for physical activity; policies that prohibit the sale of soda at school during the meal hour.

Environmental interventions are changes to the economic, social, or physical environments. Examples of healthy environments include: incorporating walking paths and recreation areas into new community development designs; making low-fat choices available in cafeterias; removing ashtrays from meeting rooms.

Why Should My Organization Become Involved in Policy & Environmental Change?

C.E.A. Winslow, one of the leading figures in the history of public health, characterized public health practice as the science and art of disease prevention, prolonging life, and promoting health and well-being through organized community effort . . . to assure everyone a standard of living adequate for the maintenance or improvement of health.

Your support of health policy and healthy environmental settings is critical in creating and maintaining a healthy community!



RESOURCES FOR POLICY AND ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE (PEC):

The Michigan Department of Community Health and its partners offer several free tools to assist you in identifying policy and environmental changes (PEC) you can make to support healthy eating, physical activity, and tobacco-free lifestyles. Visit www.mihealthtools.org to access the following PEC tools:

Healthy Community Checklist – A 40-item quick assessment of a community's health environment related to promoting physical activity, healthy eating/healthy weight, and tobacco-free lifestyles.

Promoting Active Communities - Online self-assessment to support communities in identifying actions they can take to make it easier for people to be active – from zoning rules to worksite wellness to education. Communities that successfully complete the assessment are eligible for the Governor's Council on Physical Fitness Active Community Award and associated recognition events.

Designing Healthy Environments at Work - Determine the extent to which your worksite supports employee health. The website also provides information and resources for worksites that want to take steps to create healthy work environments.

Healthy School Assessment Tool – A self-assessment and planning instrument to help schools take positive action, and the Healthy School Environment Recognition Program, to recognize schools who have demonstrated significant accomplishments in creating healthy environments.

Nutrition Environment Assessment Tool - Is an online assessment that can serve as the first step in improving your community's support of healthy eating. NEAT and the associated materials found on the website will also point to ways in which your community's environment can be improved to encourage healthier eating among its residents.

Smoke-Free Community Assessment Tool - This assessment is for communities that want to increase local smoke-free environments and need to determine the smoke-free status of any Michigan community, including work sites, restaurants, schools, college campuses, and other localities and to assess support of smoke-free environments by state and local officials. Communities can also use this tool to assess the availability of local cessation services.

EXAMPLES OF POLICY & ENVIRON- MENTAL CHANGE: Low or No Cost Ideas

- ☒ Promote farmers' market
- ☒ Identify safe walking/biking routes to school and encourage use
- ☒ Promote walking paths
- ☒ Collaborate with stores to offer fruits & vegetables, locally grown
- ☒ Work with movie theatres, video stores, roller rinks, etc. to have healthy snack options
- ☒ Combine efforts with local restaurants to offer & promote healthy food options

- ☒ Implement 24/7 smoke-free policies at local governmental buildings
- ☒ Collaborate with physician/clinician practices to ask and counsel patients on health behaviors . . . sharing with them the resources within the community
- ☒ Open schools to community for use

Contact us: Several State of Michigan departments are collaborating to assist in identifying policy and environmental changes that communities can implement to increase the healthy eating, physical activity and tobacco cessation of their residents. For more information, contact:

Robin Palmer, Cardiovascular Health, Nutrition & Physical Activity Section, 517/335-8418 or palmerr@michigan.gov